



Railroad Retirement Information

U. S. Railroad Retirement Board

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For Publication

December 2002

RRB Customer Service Plan Update

The U.S. Railroad Retirement Board's Customer Service Plan promotes the principles and objectives of customer-driven quality service agency-wide. The RRB's plan states specifically the level of service that customers can expect, and an important part of the plan is a pledge to keep beneficiaries informed of how well the RRB is meeting the plan's standards. The plan is reviewed and updated periodically as the agency gains more experience with it, compares its service with the best in business and considers feedback received from its customers.

The following questions and answers provide information about the RRB's performance in the key areas of railroad retirement, disability and survivor benefit payments, plus railroad unemployment and sickness benefit payments, and the handling of correspondence during fiscal year 2002 (October 2001 – September 2002).

1. What standards were used by the RRB in fiscal year 2002 for processing applications for railroad retirement employee or spouse annuities?

The RRB's Customer Service Plan provides that if you filed for a railroad retirement employee or spouse annuity in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the beginning date of your annuity. If you have not filed in advance, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2002, 94.1 percent of employee and 95.1 percent of spouse applicants who filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 35 days of their annuity beginning date. Taking these employee and spouse cases together, 94.7 percent of this group met the agency's standard for fiscal year 2002. Average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 10.0 and 8.1 days, respectively; the combined average processing time for these cases was 8.8 days.

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Also, of the cases processed, 97.9 percent of employee and 93.9 percent of spouse applicants who had not filed in advance received a payment, or a decision, within 65 days of their filing dates. Taken together, 96.0 percent of these cases met the agency's standard. In these cases, the average processing times for employee and spouse applications were 20.8 and 24.3 days, respectively; the combined average processing time was 22.4 days.

2. What standards were used by the RRB in fiscal year 2002 for processing applications for disability annuities under the Railroad Retirement Act?

The RRB's Customer Service Plan provides that if you filed for a disability annuity, you will receive a decision within 105 days of the date you filed your application. If it is determined that you are entitled to disability benefits, you will receive your first payment within 25 days of the date of the RRB's decision, or the earliest possible payment date, whichever is later.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2002, 53.7 percent of those filing for a disability annuity received a decision within 105 days of the date they filed an application. The average processing time was 109.2 days. Of those entitled to disability benefits, 94.2 percent received their first payment within the Customer Service Plan's time frame. Average processing time was 7.7 days.

3. How did the RRB's performance in the area of survivor benefits measure up to its standards in fiscal year 2002?

Under the Customer Service Plan, if you filed for a railroad retirement survivor annuity or a lump-sum benefit, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 65 days of the date you filed your application, or became entitled to benefits, if later. If you are already receiving a spouse annuity, you will receive your first payment, or a decision, within 35 days of the date the RRB receives notice of the employee's death.

Of the cases processed during fiscal year 2002, 81.4 percent of the applicants for an initial survivor annuity received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In addition, 96.0 percent of the applicants for a lump-sum benefit received a payment or a decision within 65 days. In cases where the survivor was already receiving a spouse annuity, 91.3 percent of the applicants received a payment or a decision within 35 days of the RRB being notified of the employee's death. Average processing time for all recurring applications was 25 days. The average processing time for lump-sum applications was 13 days.

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4. What were the standards for the handling of applications and claims for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits and how well did the RRB meet these standards?

Under the Customer Service Plan, if you filed an application for unemployment or sickness benefits, you will receive a claim form, or a decision, within 15 days of the date you filed your application. If you filed a claim for subsequent biweekly unemployment or sickness benefits, you will receive a payment, or a decision, within 15 days of the date the RRB receives your claim form.

During fiscal year 2002, 98.7 percent of unemployment benefit applications sampled for timeliness and 99.3 percent of sickness benefit applications processed met the RRB's standard. Average processing times for unemployment and sickness benefit applications were 1.6 and 2.9 days, respectively.

In addition, 99.7 percent of subsequent claims processed for unemployment and sickness benefits met the RRB's standard for fiscal year 2002. Payments are issued within two business days of processing. The average processing time for claims was 4.8 days.

5. How well did the RRB meet its standard for replying to correspondence in fiscal year 2002?

The RRB's standard provides that when you inquire by letter, you will receive a reply within 15 days of the date the agency receives your inquiry. If for any reason the RRB cannot reply within that time frame, it will acknowledge the letter and tell you how long it will be before your questions can be answered fully.

In fiscal year 2002, 98.9 percent of all correspondence the RRB received was responded to, either with an acknowledgement or with a final reply, within the standard.

6. How did the RRB's performance in meeting its standards in fiscal year 2002 compare to its performance in fiscal year 2001?

Fiscal year 2002 performance remained the same or improved when compared to fiscal year 2001 for six of the 11 customer service workloads tracked by the agency. Even with declines in five areas, the agency still met or exceeded all but two of the customer service performance targets it had set for the year in its Annual Performance Plan.

Performance remained the same or improved for retirement applications not filed in advance, initial survivor applications, lump-sum death benefits, spouse to survivor conversions, unemployment and sickness benefit claims, and disability payments.

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Slight performance declines were noted for the handling of retirement applications filed in advance (0.9 percent), unemployment benefit applications (1.0 percent), sickness benefit applications (0.2 percent) and correspondence (0.1 percent). Again, even with these declines in performance, the RRB still exceeded its Annual Performance Plan targets in these four areas. However, while the RRB's performance improved by 0.2 percent in the area of spouse to survivor conversions, it did not meet its Annual Performance Plan target of 91.5 percent for fiscal year 2002.

The most marked decline in performance (2.8 percent) came in the rendering of disability decisions. The RRB is very aware of this decline in performance and continues to seek improvements in collecting the required documentation to provide accurate and more timely handling of disability applications. However, it must be remembered that the processing of disability applications requires medical evidence and related documentation to establish entitlement; and obtaining this material can be a lengthy process.

7. Can beneficiaries provide feedback to the RRB about the service they receive?

A Customer Assessment Survey form is available in every field office allowing beneficiaries to evaluate the service they received and suggest how the agency can improve its service. Persons not satisfied with the service they received may contact the manager of the office with which they have been dealing or the regional director who is responsible for that office. Their names and addresses are available in each office.

The addresses and phone numbers of all the RRB's field offices are also available on the agency's Web site at www.rrb.gov or by calling the toll-free RRB Help Line at 1-800-808-0772. The RRB Help Line is an automated telephone service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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